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ABSTRACT

This paper explains a college-level journalistic writing project based in Kotzebue, Alaska (called Chukchi News and Information Service) which publishes primarily Eskimo, Indian and Aleut student writing in newspapers and magazines throughout Alaska. The first part of the paper discusses the philosophical underpinnings of developing a publishing project that exists specifically to open the press to minority voices. The second part of the paper provides "Chukchi News and Information Forms," which are forms the co-editors use for their students to explain the project and also obtain student permission to publish their writing. (RS)

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CHUKCHI NEWS AND INFORMATION SERVICE

A publication project of the Kotzebue-based Chukchi College, a branch campus of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

Susan B. Andrews and John Creed
Co-Editors

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CHUKCHI NEWS AND INFORMATION SERVICE

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Publishing from Arctic Alaska Since 1988

At the Crossroads of English and Journalism

How to Run a Writing Project that Publishes Minority Students in the Press

This document explains a college-level journalistic writing project based in Kotzebue, Alaska, called Chukchi News and Information Service. This project publishes primarily Eskimo, Indian and Aleut student writing in newspapers and magazines throughout Alaska.

The first part of this document discusses the philosophical underpinnings of developing a publishing project such as this that exists specifically to open the press to minority voices.

The second part, beginning on page 8, provides what are called "Chukchi News and Information Service Information Forms." These are the forms the co-editors use for their students to explain the project and also to obtain student permission to publish their writing.

We offer this information in hopes that other educators and editors will choose to use or duplicate this project in some way. Good luck!

Chukchi News and Information Service: A Voice for Eskimos, Indians, Aleuts and Other Alaskans

A Rural-Based Project

This journalism project is operated from Chukchi College, a rural division of the University of Alaska statewide system. Chukchi College is based in Kotzebue, a remote Inupiat Eskimo community that lies 30 miles above the Arctic Circle in northwest Alaska and about 175 miles from the easternmost tip of the former Soviet Union. Kotzebue, a trade and transportation hub, is about 90 percent Alaska Native and has no roads connecting it to the outside world. Kotzebue is accessible only by aircraft, snowmobile and dog team during the winter months. During the brief, ice-free summer season, cargo barges bring Kotzebue and the surrounding villages supplies for the winter season.

Most Chukchi students do not live in Kotzebue. Rather, students "attend" college classes from the villages where they live, via satellite-assisted audioconference, with fax machines sending written assignments back and forth. Students live in communities scattered across rural Alaska where few roads connect to the outside world—from the Aleutian Chain in the southwest, to Tok near the border of Canada in the east, to Barrow in the north, and scores of communities in between.

A Project By Rural and Native People

It is important to understand that Chukchi News and Information Service pieces are written primarily by Native American undergraduate students of the University of Alaska who often still subsistence hunt, fish and gather from the traditional lands and waterways on which they and their ancestors have lived for thousands of years.

Unusual Students, Unusual Circumstances

Here is a profile of a typical writer for Chukchi News and Information Service: Alaska Native female, 35 years old with four children and a full- or part-time job such as village health aide. She pursues a traditional subsistence lifestyle while taking six credits per semester toward an associate's or bachelor's degree in rural development, education or social work.

An Addition to often Negative Minority Press Coverage

Like their Native American counterparts in the rest of the country, Alaska Natives still struggle with the rapid changes in their culture brought about by the dominant Western culture.

Native social problems, including alcoholism, suicide and domestic violence, have been covered extensively in recent years by the Alaska press. In fact, in January 1988 the Anchorage Daily News' Pulitzer Prize-winning series, "A People in Peril," offered a haunting look at social ills among Alaska Natives. Another kind of coverage found regularly in the mainstream press is what National Native News host Gary Fife on National Public Radio calls "beads and feathers" coverage—public events where Natives don traditional dress and engage in ceremonial activities.

Native people are writing about their own lives, their own issues, their own problems for both the mainstream and Native press in Alaska.

While far-reaching public service projects such as "A People in Peril" are necessary and important, as is "beads and feathers" coverage, the public often is left with a somewhat distorted if not incomplete look at rural and Alaska Native people, especially for lack of press coverage from their own perspective. This is also true for minority cultures throughout the United States.

Through Chukchi News and Information Service, "ordinary" rural and Native people are writing about their own lives, their own issues, their own problems, for both the mainstream and the Native press in Alaska. For example, when Inupiaq Eskimo Beatrice Mills writes in the Arctic Sounder about the dangers of fetal alcohol syndrome among her people, her message carries far more credibility and penetration than if written by a non-Native.

"If only one woman saves her baby from FAS after reading (my piece), then it will be worth it," said Ms. Mills.

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Writers Speak Out on Key Issues

Writers for Chukchi News and Information Service also speak out on public policy. For example, Rose Heyano, an Alaska Native from Bristol Bay, argues against fish farming in a piece that ran in the Tundra Times opposite an article by Unalaska Mayor Paul Fuhs supporting fish farming in Alaska. The paper laid them out on facing pages.

Then Tundra Times editor A.J. McClanahan said she had never used a student piece in that way before, but Ms. Heyano's was so well-argued that it could easily hold up the opposing view.

Culturally Relevant and Universal Subjects

Students have offered a unique voice from rural Alaska to readers throughout the rural and urban regions of this vast state by writing about culturally relevant and pertinent subjects, such as growing up in a family of reindeer herders or coping with the changes brought about by the clash of Western and Native cultures.

This does not mean, though, that rural and Native people write only on Native or even strictly rural issues. Rather, rural Alaskans' world view also includes interests and concerns shared by other minorities as well as mainstream America, including the health hazards of smoking; computers; fish farming; tourism; corporal punishment; mutual funds; cancer; and AIDS. In this way, the public might understand not only the differences, but rural and Native residents' similarities with urban Alaskans and all Americans.

Students write about culturally relevant subjects, such as growing up in a family of reindeer herders or coping with the clash of Western and Native cultures.

Basic Skills Work

Most who publish through Chukchi News and Information Service are novice writers with serious basic skills problems. Although a handful of writers do hold degrees, the vast majority of the published pieces that this project produces are written by developmental, first-, or second-year college students who still have a way to go even for an associate's degree.

Typically, these pieces have been written in required writing and other university core courses. For example, a piece by Inupiat Eskimo Linda Akeya, titled "Elders Offer Advice on How to Skin A Polar Bear," was written in a developmental English class because the author, like many rural and Native university students in Alaska, she was underprepared for college-level courses.

Incentive to Excel

Coupled with little or no professional writing experience, students must focus on rewriting in this project, not just once or twice, but multiple times in order to prepare a typical piece for publication.

Consequently, students have dedicated countless hours to this project because they realize thousands of people throughout Alaska will read their work, a scenario that represents a tremendous incentive to excel. Students move far beyond the typical "drudgery" of a composition class, for example, where they typically write only for the instructor or, at the most, for fellow students. Instead, they know their writing will speak to the public through the press from their own world view.

Scope of Publication

Since its creation, Chukchi News and Information Service participants have published more than 175 writings throughout Alaska, including the following newspapers and magazines: Anchorage Daily News, We Alaskans magazine, The Anchorage Times, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Heartland magazine, Northland News, Tundra Times, Tundra Drums, Bristol Bay Times, Aleutian Eagle, All-Alaska Weekly, UAF Sun Star, Arctic Sounder, and Mushing magazine.

No other press service like this exists in Alaska.

Recognition for Project

Chukchi News and Information Service has captured several national and regional awards, among them The Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, the Women in Communications, Inc. Clarion Award, the National Council for Christians and Jews Certificate of Recognition, and the Alaska Press Club Public Service Award, and a citation from the Alaska State Legislature.

Project Forges Culturally Based Brand of Writing

Journalistic Writing Style

This writing project's emphasis on the kind of clear, straightforward communication that is the essence of journalistic writing serves Alaska Native students particularly well as they struggle to overcome the difficulties of bilingualism and pidgin English.

Students typically are invited by the project's co-editors to publish their work, which entails demonstrating exceptional effort outside of class and beyond the expectations of their assigned work if they are to participate in the project and polish their pieces for publication.

Working with Editors

As students engage in the real-life, hands-on experience of writing and rewriting for publication, they work closely with instructors who, as former working journalists, apply their professional experience in the industry to the project, contacting newspaper and magazine editors. Educators elsewhere can establish similar working relationships with editors of local publications that often welcome well-written,

Culturally Based Writing at Work

Chukchi News and Information Service publishes essays, opinion pieces, hard news and feature stories that otherwise probably would not be written. Such efforts seek to put the tools of communications within the grasp of rural and Native people.

> Student participants demonstrate exceptional effort and far surpass the goal of "getting an A" on their assigned work.

Because Native culture is based on a close relationship with the land, many student pieces focus on subsistence activities or issues.

Native leaders believe they must maintain an eternal vigilance over traditional lands as they continue to safeguard their people's subsistence pursuits—a way of life that includes powerful spiritual and cultural dimensions of survival in addition to providing food sustenance for survival.

Unfortunately, the overwhelmingly majority of statewide media coverage of rural and Native issues—especially subsistence rights, which has pitted urban and rural Alaskans against each other for years—comes from the non-Native urban press. The Chukchi News and Information Service project offers a way to stem that tide as well as an opportunity to train writers in rural Alaska to report on issues from a rural perspective.

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Other Issues

Chukchi News and Information Service also distributes writings about issues and cultural activities that would not appear in the press as often if at all, such as: making seal oil; searching for mouse caches; a Native mother enduring a miscarriage; simple educational issues such how to quiet a fussy baby; growing up poor and Inupiaq in the 1950s in a remote Arctic village; or heating your house with wooden pallets.

Or, Chukchi News and Information Service covers issues that are part of the public mind, but might be ignored or not otherwise written by rural and Native writers, such as: AIDS policy and condom distribution in the schools; obituary of a distinguished-elder; profile of a local Eskimo successfully bridging traditional and modern worlds; serious objections to the popular television show about Alaska, "Northern Exposure"; recycling compost in rural Alaska; Native autobiographies; liquor sales in Kotzebue; or overfishing of salmon on the mighty Yukon River.

Project Writers Expose Injustice

The overall project speaks to the general injustice of media coverage in Alaska and even in the nation as a whole, but some pieces, such as Ronald Gooden's "Inupiaq recalls hardships of school in Fairbanks," explain the specific, blatant injustice of racism and prejudice against basic human rights that Natives have endured historically but that are seldom revealed in today's press and almost never found in Alaska's history books.

Publication Brings Respect to Participants, Educates Readers

An electrician at the Red Dog Mine in Northwest Alaska is also working toward a journalism degree and participating in Chukchi News and Information Service. After publishing her writing a few times in Kotzebue's Arctic Sounder, this student, Inupiaq Eskimo Geri Reich, was asked in class if workers at the mine had noticed her by-line in the local paper. "Oh, yes," she replied. "Practically everybody." She said even "the white guys" who work at the mine and live out of state are now taking an interest in the region, including the problems that local Native people face.

Geri Reich obviously felt great receiving compliments from fellow workers, but even over the audioconference it seemed obvious she was holding something back.

Finally, she said, "OK, I'll say it. There's a lot of prejudice up here against Native people."

She said many of the non-Natives working at the mine don't have much regard for the Natives who work there. She said, though, that many of the non-Natives who complimented her on her piece in the paper now seemed to look at her as a real person and with respect for the first time. She wasn't, in her words, "just a dumb Native anymore."

Results of Project Seen in Academic Setting

Writing Skills Strengthened

Participants typically show remarkable academic progress as a result of preparing their pieces and seeing them published.

"The change in students who have been published through this project is astounding," said Taylor Brelsford, a University faculty member in Dillingham, a fishing community west of Anchorage.

"I see such a marked difference in their level of confidence, especially about taking other courses that require written assignments," Brelsford said. "They also feel great pride and accomplishment when friends and relatives have read their writing in the newspaper."

Working with Student Newspaper

Student essays that appear regularly in the Sun Star, the University of Alaska's student newspaper in Fairbanks, have compelled more on-campus Natives to become involved in the UAF Sun Star, according to its editor, because for the first time they see pieces relevant to their own lives from rural Alaska. Those who would attempt this project elsewhere would do well to establish a working relationship with their campus newspaper.

Project Strives for More Full-Time Journalists

Results from participants can be as subtle as students who have been published through this project and now write for Alaska newspapers as correspondents, or as obvious as students majoring in journalism and landing full-time jobs in the industry—bringing their rural Alaska perspective with them.

Community Affirms Students

The student writers themselves also report extensive public feedback from the project. That recognition drives their desire to persevere with their education.

Inupiaq Eskimo Hannah Paniyaviuk Loon, for example, reports that her people deeply appreciate her writing about many aspects of Inupiaq life that have gone unwritten and therefore misunderstood or largely ignored in Alaska, particularly by the dominant culture.

Long-Term Goals, Ramifications

Today, few rural and Alaska Native residents choose journalism or writing careers because the road is not easy for many reasons. Rural Native students in particular face awesome obstacles, especially the essential mastering of English, often their second language. Yet, Chukchi News and Information Service has shown rural and Alaska Native residents that the press in Alaska is accessible while providing the general public with a grassroots understanding of rural life. Most important, as the project continues to spawn writers, more rural and Native people will be able to apply for and fill jobs in newsrooms across the state.

Publication is the incentive that drives rural and Alaska Native writers who participate in Chukchi News and Information Service. Ultimately, they gain an awareness of the power of publication and a path to become leaders in the Information Age.

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From the Editors:

We Can Benefit from Rethinking the Teaching of English in a Western-Style Education

Educators must begin to seek ways to embrace the culturally diverse means by which peoples of the world communicate. The thrust of Chukchi News and Information Service is to provide the people with access to the power of the press while accentuating the cultural richness inherent in diverse populations.

We must ask ourselves: Is Western culture unconsciously not questioning the Western way of writing and teaching writing and simply saying, "Do it our way or not at all"? Minorities going through college too often are forced to become "white" in their thinking while downplaying their own culture.

We are reminded of an insight offered by Native American writers Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris in an interview with Bill Moyers. They said the genocide of Native Americans was not the only tragedy resulting from the white man's ruthless expansion across the Americas: Westerners also missed an historic opportunity to learn from Native people and incorporate some of the aboriginal people's wisdom in the Western way of thinking and living.

Educators may heed this call by listening to the voices of all minority populations and observing their cultural rules and patterns of communications and striving to incorporate this valuable knowledge in the teaching and practice of writing.

In any case, with a publication project such as Chukchi News and Information Service, the victories come steadily but quietly. For instance, in September 1992, we opened the pages of an issue of the Arctic Sounder, a weekly newspaper that serves Northwest Arctic Alaska, and discovered that half of it had been written by our students--but not under the Chukchi News and Information Service byline. In fact, three students had taken it upon themselves to publish pieces and photographs as freelancers. We felt a deep sense of satisfaction knowing that they had developed the confidence through Chukchi News and Information Service to go it alone.

Now that these students officially "don't need us anymore," we can focus on bringing more Native and rural writers into the project so that before long, not only will these fresh voices be writing for the Arctic Sounder, someday they also will be running this newspaper, which is, after all, the region's permanent record of the people's history.

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Chukchi News and Information Service Release and Information Forms

Write your name here _____

Chukchi News and Information Service, a student writing project, began operating during Spring Semester 1988 at Chukchi College, the Kotzebue branch of the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The service started as a way for rural University of Alaska students to have their writings published from their English, journalism and other courses offered at Chukchi College. Since its inception, Chukchi News and Information Service has distributed student writings that have appeared in the Anchorage Daily News, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner, Northland News, Tundra Times, All-Alaska Weekly, Arctic Sounder, Mushing magazine, and many other publications across the state, as well as being broadcast over radio.

The project has captured several national and regional awards, including the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, the Women in Communications, Inc. Clarion Award, the National Conference of Christians and Jews Certificate of Recognition and the Alaska Press Club Public Service Award.

Chukchi's classes are offered via audioconference across most of rural Alaska, so Chukchi News and Information Service has published pieces from a broad cross-section of rural residents.

Chukchi News and Information Service offers students the opportunity to communicate with a much broader audience than their classmates and professors, sometimes with thousands of readers across Alaska. It is also a learning experience for students to undertake the rigorous task of writing up to publication quality.

Students who choose to publish their writing through this project must sign a publication release form.

Also, the biographical form will help the instructor(s) prepare your piece for publication. For example, the personal information will help us to write an "endnote" for the article.

Not all of the questions may be relevant to you. Please answer as many as possible.

Chukchi Campus
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS
P.O. Box 297 • Kotzebue, Alaska 99752 • (907) 442-3400

Chukchi News and Information Service
A Publishing Project of Chukchi College in Kotzebue

Students enrolled in writing and other courses at Chukchi College in Kotzebue have the opportunity to be published through Chukchi News and Information Service. Students' work may be published in newspapers, magazines, books or broadcast over radio. Students are occasionally paid for their submissions; however, that is at the discretion of the publisher. Pieces may be published immediately or over a period of years. The main objective of this publication project is to help students get published as a way to both share their work with the public and provide an incentive for excellence.

Publication Release Form

I, _____, wish to be
(print or type your name clearly here)

published through Chukchi News and Information Service. I hereby release the following written assignments in ENGLISH 111: Methods of Written Communication.

_____
_____
_____

I understand that the pieces I submit may be edited to suit the various media. I understand that only those pieces that I specifically submit for publication will be published through Chukchi News and Information Service.

_____ _____
Student's Signature Date

Chukchi Campus
UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA FAIRBANKS
P.O. Box 297 • Kotzebue, Alaska 99752 • (907) 442-3400

Biographical Information Form

Please fill out as completely as possible.

Name _____

Address _____

Work Telephone _____

Home Telephone _____ FAX _____

Current Occupation & Title _____

Are you Alaska Native? _____ Yes _____ No

If so, what group? Check appropriate one(s): Inupiat _____ Yup'ik _____
Athabascan _____ Siberian Yup'ik _____ Aleut _____ Tlingit _____
Tsimshian _____ Haida _____

If not, how long have you lived in Alaska? _____

Birthplace _____

Birthdate _____

Do you have any children? How many _____

Are you studying for a degree ? _____ Yes _____ No

If so, at what university or branch campus? _____

What degree? _____ AA _____ BA _____ BS _____
MA _____ other _____

What is your major? _____

What are your career plans? _____
_____

Family Background:
I grew up in a family of _____ children.
Did you live a traditional subsistence lifestyle? Yes _____ No _____ Partially _____
Do you still live a traditional lifestyle? Yes _____ No _____ Partially _____

Explain _____

Other Information _____

Thank you.